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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001222

SIPDIS

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Charge's Jaffna visit reveals changing attitudes towards military and the Tigers

Refs: Colombo 1190, and previous

U) Classified by Donald A. Camp, Charge d'Affaires.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Charge and poloff visited Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka, July 6-8. Demining, high security zones, and LTTE taxation are all high in the minds of local residents. Business activity is up, funded by remittances from abroad and international NGOs. GSL has funded infrastructure restoration, especially electricity and some buildings, but little in housing and rehabilitation. Popularity of LTTE is hard to gauge; its arbitrary taxation is cited as one impediment to investment in Jaffna. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) JAFFNA BY ROAD: Charge and poloff visited Jaffna, in northern Sri Lanka, July 6-8. Charge and poloff traveled up Route A9, the north-south highway through the LTTE-held Vanni. While the trip was mostly uneventful, the level of infrastructure (LTTE-run courts, police stations, customs checkpoints, "Bank of Tamil Eelam") in the LTTE-controlled areas was impressive. This extended even to the Tamil Eelam police force, which - as we discovered the hard way - has radar guns and conducts regular speed traps. Also of interest was the Asian Development Bank-sponsored road reconstruction project on the A9, which is reportedly staffed mostly by Sinhalese laborers because of what is said to be a labor shortage in the Vanni, underscoring the changes in that region in recent times.

3. (C) GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES CITE BASIC NEEDS: In meetings with the Government Agent (GA) and a representative of a Tamil political party, a message of optimism tinged with uncertainty came across. The GA for Jaffna, C. Pathmanathan, noted to Charge that while limited amounts of assistance for rehabilitation was trickling in to Jaffna, little was coming from the government and much more needed to be done. Citing difficulties and frustration with GSL bureaucracy, the GA noted that only a fraction of returning Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees had been paid the assistance packages they were promised from the government.

4. (C) Charge also met with S. Sivajilingam, Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO) MP for Jaffna. While Sivajilingam described himself as "confident" regarding a solution of a GSL proposal for interim administration in the north and east, he cited the possibility of dissolution of Parliament by President Kumaratunga and elections. Sivajilingam further noted that certain "ground realities" would have to be faced by both the GSL and the LTTE, such as the hiring of Tamil - or at least Tamil-speaking- police officers in the north to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to violence. Since very few Tamil-speakers are now being recruited nation-wide into the police and military, there is a real problem of communication between the Jaffna public and the security forces.

5. (C) IDP SITUATION EXACERBATED BY SECURITY ZONES, LANDMINES: We visited a community of 300 homeless persons who have been squatting in deserted buildings for 13 years. (It would be too generous to call it an IDP camp.) The residents expressed their frustration and anger at being kept from their homes, located in an area occupied by the Sri Lanka Army as part of a broad security cordon around their bases. (As previously reported, the issue of the so-called "High Security Zones" continues to be contentious.) The camp has eight toilets and two wells, and is situated 200 yards from a minefield. The residents said that the LTTE had given them assistance, but the GSL- through the GA's office- had promised them assistance, but never followed through. Residents of the camp saw the members of the Sri Lanka Army as not a benevolent force providing control, but rather as aggressors and usurpers of their rightful homes. Pleading for assistance from the delegation, the residents of the camp underscored the need for assistance of any kind, even something so basic as plastic sheeting to supplement their palm-leaf roofs.

16. (C) Landmines continue to pose a major problem in the north, especially for individuals who wish to return to their homes or cultivate their fields. Even a few blocks of Jaffna town remain cordoned off with uncleared mines. Charge visited the State Department-sponsored QRDF site east of Jaffna town. Underscoring the importance of mine clearance activities, all contacts we met with on this trip brought up the need for active demining efforts in Jaffna. Currently, GSL and international NGOs estimate that there are between one and two million landmines throughout Sri Lanka, with the highest concentration in the north. With the departure of the QRDF team shortly, the USG will no longer be demining directly, but the Department will shortly sign a contract for extensive training and equipment for Sri Lankan military deminers.

17. (C) COMMENT: In Post's regular visits to Jaffna, signs of change are starting to appear. People are hoping desperately for a peace settlement that will assure that conflict will not return and they can continue the slow process of a return to normalcy. The LTTE's behind-the-scenes influence continues to be a problem - for government servants whose activities are constrained, for businesspeople who have a significantly higher cost of business from arbitrary taxation, and even for booklovers and sports fans, whose library and renovated stadium are on hold until the LTTE approves. Despite all these obstacles, we saw a sense of optimism among many in Jaffna and a feeling that Jaffna's traditional resiliency will see them through. END COMMENT.

CAMP